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Lawmakers blast Army privatization plan

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The Army should consult Congress before launching its massive “third wave” outsourcing initiative, under which the service is weighing whether to contract-out more than 214,000 jobs, 68 members of the House of Representatives said Friday.

In a Dec. 20 letter to Army Secretary Thomas White, the lawmakers—all but 4 of whom are Democrats—said the “third wave” plan could threaten military readiness.

“Such transfers ... have the potential of seriously eroding the readiness of the total force at a time when the nation is facing a determined security threat,” the lawmakers wrote in the letter, which was orchestrated by Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-Texas. The House members also called on the Army to consult with legislators before implementing the plan.

An Army spokeswoman said the service is open to working with Congress. “We already briefed the principal staff of the House Armed Services Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee and have answered numerous congressional inquiries,” said Maj. Amy Hannah. “We will obtain support from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Congress on the approach.”

The “third wave” initiative already is being implemented inside the service, as Army commands draw up plans to compete all “noncore” functions. White is due to approve all plans by March 2003.

But some “third wave” deadlines have been pushed back. Army commands originally had until Nov. 29 to submit requests to exempt certain positions from the initiative, but this deadline has been extended until mid-January. The deadline for approving exemption requests has been pushed from Dec. 20 to February 20.

John Threlkeld, a legislative assistant with the American Federation of Government Employees, said the lawmakers’ letter asks Congress to

suspend the initiative until it has received formal approval from Congress, including any approval for new legislative authorities.

“The Reyes letter urges Secretary White to suspend the ‘third wave’ initiative in its entirety, and AFGE couldn’t agree more,” said Threlkeld.